

MATARIKI - Friday, 14 July 2023

“Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the Stars, in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.” St Francis of Assisi, quoted by Pope Francis in Laudato si’

The Matariki star cluster appears in the early morning sky in New Zealand during the mid-winter months. Known by the ancient Greek name of Pleiades it is one of the brightest clusters in the sky.

This year is the second national holiday recognising Matariki but it has been celebrated by the Maori and Pacific people for generations. Matariki’s first rising in late June or early July marks the beginning of the Maori New Year and is underpinned by three major aspects:

- ✧ remembering the past and the people we have lost in the past year. We celebrate them and remember them.
- ✧ celebrating the present - coming together, feasting and celebrating who we are now.
- ✧ looking to the future with the hope and the promise of a new year and everything it brings.

Matauranga Maori (ancestral knowledge and wisdom) is at the heart of the celebrations of the Matariki public holiday. The idea of moving fireworks displays from Guy Fawke’s Day to Matariki was vetoed as being inappropriate at a meditative time.

Professor Rangi Matamua, a Maori cultural astronomer and 2023 New Zealander of the Year, said. “There is a spirituality connected to Matariki and also an environmental awareness because the different stars (of the cluster) are associated with different environmental domains”

There is an association between the human experience and stars. Stars are on our flag. We look into space to get a sense of the bigger questions about the meaning of life itself and to get an understanding of our part of the cosmos. More than 50 percent of the world’s population can’t see the night sky and that’s an indictment on what we are doing, not only to the planet but what we are doing to ourselves as creatures. Hopefully Matariki brings that awareness out in us as well.”

“There is not a single person in this country who does not descend from people who used the stars to navigate, to tell time, to plant and harvest. It has been part of the history of all humans. I really hope that Matariki is an opportunity for all of us in the country to come together as a nation to celebrate all the wonderful things that make us who we are.”

***The Stars of Matariki Constellation**

Matariki: - the mother of the other eight stars of the constellation - connected to health and well-being.

Matariki means ‘little eyes’ or ‘the eyes of God’.

Pohutakawa: - you can look upon this star in reflection and remembrance of loved ones who have died in the past year.

Tupuanuku: - associated with food grown in the ground. A reminder to grow food that can be shared with family and friends.

Tupuarangi: - associated with food that comes from the sky and is linked to birds, but also food grown on trees and bushes.

Waiti: - connected to fresh water and living creatures in the rivers, streams and lakes.

Waita: - associated with the ocean and represents food gathered from the sea. This star is also significant for its influences over tides and floodwaters.

Waipuna-a-rangi: - This star is connected to the rain. The name means “water that pools in the sky”.

We can look on this star in reflection and recognition of how vital fresh rainfall is to life on earth.

Ururangi: - Ururangi is connected to the wind. Traditionally used to forecast the nature of the wind for the year to come.

Hiwa-i-te-rangi: - This star is connected to the promise of a prosperous season. Maori traditionally would use this star to set their desires and dreams for the year.